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ABSTRACT

Examined were the subjective reactions to group counseling of 176 black remediation students at a predominantly black Eastern university. The data was obtained through the use of a 13-item evaluation instrument administered during the 11th week of the 15-week program. The data were analyzed in terms of chi square analysis of response rates to positive, neutral, and negative response categories. The data were analyzed using the total sample as a whole and then by using sex of counselee, style of counselor, and session length respectively as independent variables. It was found that counselees expressed positive evaluations to the framework or climate of their groups but were neutral or negative regarding perceived intrapersonal gains resulting from their group experience; more males than females felt comfortable in the group situation; group members with directive leaders were more positive toward the group atmosphere maintained by group leaders than were members with non-directive leaders; and members of 90-minute groups expressed more negative reactions than members of 60-minute groups. (Author)

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Subjective Reactions of Black College Studerts to Group Counseling

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Black Reactions to Group Counseling

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Abstract

This study examined the subjective reactions to group counseling of 176 black remediation students at a predominantly black Eastern university. The data was obtained through the use of a 13 item evaluation instrument administered during the 11th week of the 15 week program. The data were analyzed in terms of chi square analysis of response rates to positive, neutral, and negative response categories. The data were analyzed using the total sample as a whole and then by using sex of counselee, style of counselor, and session length respectively as independent variables. With $p<.05$, it was found that courselees expressed positive evaluations to the framework or climate of their groups but were neutral or negative regarding perceived intrapersonal gains resulting from their group experience; more males than females felt comfortable in the group situation; group members with directive leaders were more positive toward the group atmosphere maintained by group leaders than were members with non-directive leaders; finally, members of 90-minute groups expressed more negative reactions than members of 60-minute groups.

Subjective Reactions of Black College Students to Group Counseling

For the past few years, a predominantly black Eastern university has used group counseling to enhance its remediation program. The remediation program was designed for freshmen with unrealized potential in mathematics, English, and/or study skills. Participation in the program was determined by SAT scores (low). All remediation students were required to participate in group counseling (growth and development groups). The purpose of this study was to examine remediation student reactions to group counseling.

A literature search on group counseling and blacks revealed mixed findings. Several studies reported personality and/or personal adjustment improvements in black participants in group counseling (Healey, 1970; Little, 1972; Varner, 1970; King, 1974). In a non-empirical evaluation of group counseling and racially-mixed, college-level, remediation students, Dill (1976) reported improved student morale. On the other hand, Siegler (1973), Jones (1973), Livingston (1972), Kehres (1972), Williams (1972), and Howard (1974) reported no significant changes in black group counselees. Regarding responsiveness, Cimbolic (1973) reported that black counselees gave higher ratings (competence, preference, etc.) to more experienced counselors than to less experienced counselors; Williams

(1974) reported no differences in levels of self-disclosure and trust among those counselled by professionals and those counseled by minimally trained peer counselors; Ficht (1973) reported that black students were more responsive in counselor directed rather than tape directed groups. Aledort & Grunebaum (1969), narrating a group experience with young blacks, reported that group membership was unstable at first and that when membership stabilized, it consisted mostly of males; many of the females quit to form a separate all-female group for the purpose of discussing "female" interests. Finally, some authors have reasoned that certain theoretical approaches are more effective than others with blacks. Harper (1974), Siegler (1973), and Workman (1974) have recommended directive and/or action-oriented models while Walker (1973) recommended socioteleological (Adlerian) methods.

The present study was designed to examine black remediation student reactions to group counseling in general and, also, in tems of sex of counselee, counseling style, and length of group sessions. The 24 counseling groups used in this study averaged 7 members in size and utilized a co-leadership model with a male and a female as group leaders. This model permitted an examination of sex differences in counselee reactions unbiased by sex of group leaders. Two types of counseling style were used; two of the groups were structured, action-oriented, leader centered, and directive; the

other groups were unstructured, group-centered, and non-directive. Finally, two different session lengths were used; 14 of the groups met in weekly sessions which were 60 minutes in length; the other groups met in 90 minute sessions. Students were arbitrarily assigned to groups to fit their class schedules.

Procedure

A 13-item subjective evaluation instrument (Carrington, 1975) was administered to 176 group members. Each item was a statement of some group characteristic about which the respondent could express the degree of his (her) agreement or disagreement based on his (her) group experience. Each item contained a five-point response scale labelled strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree, respectively. The items on this instrument were representative of open-ended evaluations made by students in previous groups. The instrument was administered during the 11th week of the 15 week program; it was assumed that this was a time when the students would be experienced enough with group counseling to give meaningful evaluations and yet would not be influenced by termination processes. The students were advised that they need not put their names on the instrument.

Results

For purposes of analysis, the data from the five scale points were collapsed into three categories: positive (strongly agree and agree), neutral, and negative (disagree and strongly disagree). This was done in order to facilitate interpretation and was justified by the fact that preliminary review of the data revealed no advantage in retaining the five categories. These data were analyzed using chi-square goodness-of-fit tests.

The list of items, the percentages of responses falling in each category, and chi-square values are presented in Table 1. It can be seen that items 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, and 11 all have significant chi-squares with most of the responses falling in the positive category. This indicates that most of the students have positive reactions in the areas covered by these items. The remaining items had even distributions (non-significant chi-squares) across categories or had large neutral or negative category response rates. This indicates that students were mostly equivocal or negative on these latter items. It is noteworthy that the former group of items (high positive response rates) focuses on things happening out-in-the-group or with other people in the group (ideas freely expressed, group leaders helpful, etc.) while the latter items (4,5,7,8,10,12, and 13) focus on intrapersonal dynamics (trusting others, learning about oneself, etc.)

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The impact of the previously defined directive (D) and non-directive (N) counseling styles was examined using chi-square tests of independence (Table 2). Only 3 of the 13 items showed significant differences between styles; these items (1,3, and 6) referred to the free expression of ideas, the relaxed group atmosphere, and the helpfulness of the group leaders. For each of these three items, the D groups had higher positive response rates than the N groups. Taken together, these three items appear to refer to the climate of the group or the way in which it is run. The perceptions of D group members are at variance with those of N group members in that D group members perceive the groups as having a relaxed atmosphere, helpful leaders, and free expression of ideas more so than N group members. This finding is probably more reflective of the differences in group styles than in differences in the utility value of the two styles. That is, the three characteristics mentioned here are probably more sought after by D group leaders than N group leaders.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

A comparative analysis of the reactions of students to 60 munute (short) and 90 minute (long) group sessions was performed using chi-square tests. The data (Table 3) show that eight of the thirteen items reflected significant differences between reactions to the short and long group sessions. In each of these cases (5,6,7,8,9,10, and 13), more long session members than short session members expressed negative reactions to their counseling experience. Since this was true for the majority of the items, it appeared that fewer students felt benefited by the 90 minute sessions than felt benefited by the 60 minute sessions.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

On four of the items, (i.e. the relaxed atmosphere of the group, the helpfulness of the group leaders, the ease of talking to the group leaders, and understanding other people better) chi-square analysis revealed sex differences (Table 4). On all four of these items, males had a higher positive response rate than females. More males than females appear to be expressing comfort with the group situation (other people, group leaders, group atmosphere). In further support of this notion is the fact that the only two items with marginally significant sex differences ($.05 < p < .07$) refer to trusting other group members (item 4) and feeling better about oneself

(item 13). Both of these references can be interpreted as indicating comfort in the group and on both of these items, males had higher positive response rates.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The data were examined for interactions among the factors which may have influenced the findings. None were found.

Discussion

The overall reaction of students to their counseling experience indicated that most felt that the group climate or framework characteristics were positive. When evaluating intrapersonal gains made, however, the respondents were mostly neutral, negative, or evenly divided among the categories. This finding is consistent with the previously cited studies of Siegler (1973) and Livingston (1972) who reported that while making no significant intrapersonal gains in their group experience, black group members evidenced positive attitudes toward participation. The present study's finding was also replicated by Joice (1976) and Hawkins (1976) in earlier studies conducted at the same university used here.

Examination of the impact of two different counseling styles revealed no differences relative to perceived intrapersonal gains. Consideration of the items which showed significant differences between styles suggested that the members

of the structured, directive groups were more positive to the atmosphere maintained in the groups (by the group leaders) than were the members of non-structured, non-directive groups. This finding was interpreted as possibly reflecting differences in style only and not differences in perceived utility value of the two styles. It should be mentioned, however, that this latter finding is a least partially consistent with the findings cited earlier which imply the superiority of the action-oriented, structured styles over the non-directive, non-structured styles when dealing with black students.

Sex differences found indicated that more males than females felt comfortable in the group situation. This finding is consistent with the finding of Aledort & Grunebaum (1969) (mentioned earlier). This finding is subject to opposing interpretations. One interpretation is that males actually benefited more from their counseling experience than did females. Since males more often expressed being comfortable in the groups than did females, males may have felt more inclined than females to work on group goals (self-improvement). On the other hand, it is possible that males benefited less than females in that the males may have been only superficially involved, may not have been working on or confronting any problems, and this hanging-out-in-the-group may have led to their higher frequency of comfort reporting. The resolution of this matter requires greater empirical scrutiny.

The comparison of session lengths revealed a clear and consistent finding of more negative reactions to the long (90 minute) sessions than to the short (60 munute) sessions. Because of the pervasive nature of this finding across most of the items, it is not likely that this finding indicates less self-confrontive work being done in short groups than in long groups. It is more likely that a direct interpretation of greater perceived utility in the short rather than long groups is valid. Since this examination of session length is unique in the literature, replications and elaborations of the study of session length are needed before reasonable interpretations can be made.

Obviously, a determination of the efficacy of the counseling experience for black students cannot be based solely on subjective reactions of counselees. It is difficult to note whether a positive reaction such as feeling comfortable indicates group working or group loitering. Objective measures, such as personality inventories, need to be considered. Based on what is presented here, howecer, black student perceptions of their group counseling experience were influenced by sex of participant, counseling style, and session length. Moreover, it appears that while black students perceived positive group framework characteristics (relaxed atmosphere, free expression of ideas, helpful leaders, etc.) they felt dubious as to intrapersonal gains.

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Table 1

Response Distribution (Percentages) on the

Group Counseling Evaluation Instrument

Question	Response Category			Chi Square
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	
1. Ideas can be freely expressed in the group	65.7	21.5	12.8	83.08**
2. Feelings are mutually shared by group members	48.0	26.0	26.0	16.68**
3. The group atmosphere is relaxing	47.7	31.6	20.7	19.28**
4. I feel that I can trust other group members	41.7	44.0	14.3	28.73**
5. The group discussions are meaningful to me	37.9	37.4	24.7	5.83
6. I find the group leaders to be helpful	52.9	31.6	15.5	36.66**
7. I learn more about myself in the group	25.0	29.0	46.0	13.16**
8. I learn how to improve my relationship with others through the group experience	41.9	27.9	30.2	5.77
9. The group experience helps me to understand other people better	51.4	27.2	21.4	26.39**

Table 1 (continued)

Question	Response Category Positive	Neutral	Negative	Chi Square
10. The group experience helps me to develop more confidence in myself	31.4	34.9	33.7	.32
11. I find it easy to talk with the group leaders	66.5	25.0	8.5	94.2**
12. I would recommend this type of group experience to a friend	39.9	24.9	35.3	6.15*
13. The group experience has helped me to feel better about myself	25.0	41.3	33.7	6.85*

Note N=176

Chi-Squares based on raw scores.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 2

Response Distribution on the Group Counseling Evaluation Instrument by Counseling Style: Directive (D) vs Non-Directive (N)

Statement	Response Category						Chi Square
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		
	N	D	N	D	N	D	
1. Ideas can be freely expressed in the group	58.4	95.2	25.7	0.0	15.9	4.8	10.69**
2. Feeling are mutually shared by group members	47.8	36.4	23.9	45.5	28.3	18.2	4.36
3. The group atmosphere is relaxing	43.4	81.8	31.9	18.2	24.8	0.0	12.10**
4. I feel that I can trust other group members	37.4	63.6	45.2	31.8	17.4	4.5	5.82
5. The group discussions are meaningful to me	31.9	45.5	37.2	40.9	31.0	13.6	3.03
6. I find the group leaders to be helpful	49.1	72.7	29.8	27.3	21.1	0.0	6.61*
7. I learn more about myself in the group	21.7	31.8	27.0	36.4	51.3	31.8	2.83
8. I learn how to improve my relationship with others through the group experience	40.2	42.9	25.0	42.9	34.8	14.3	4.42
9. The group experience helps me to understand other people better	48.7	63.6	25.7	31.8	25.7	4.5	4.76

Table 2 (continued)

Statement	Response Category						Chi Square
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		
	N	D	N	D	N	D	
10. The group experience helps me to develop more confidence in myself	30.4	27.3	33.0	40.9	36.5	31.8	.51
11. I find it easy to talk with the group leaders	67.0	77.3	23.5	22.7	9.6	0.0	2.40
12. I would recommend this type of group experience to a friend	33.9	54.5	26.8	22.7	39.3	22.7	3.60
13. The group experience has helped me to feel better about myself	24.8	23.8	38.9	57.1	36.3	19.0	2.98

Note. Directive: n=22. Non-Directive: n=115.

Chi-Squares based on raw scores

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 3

Response Distribution on the Group Counseling Evaluation Instrument by Session Length: 60 min. (S) vs 90 min. (L)

Statement	Response Category						Chi Square
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		
	S	L	S	L	S	L	
1. Ideas can be freely expressed in the group	69.5	61.0	23.2	19.5	7.4	19.5	5.61
2. Feelings are mutually shared by group members	48.4	47.4	29.5	21.8	22.1	30.8	2.22
3. The group atmosphere is relaxing	48.9	46.8	33.0	30.4	18.1	22.8	.60
4. I feel that I can trust other group members	43.2	39.2	44.2	44.3	12.6	16.5	.60
5. The group discussions are meaningful to me	49.5	24.4	36.8	38.5	13.7	37.2	16.85**
6. I find the group leaders to be helpful	62.1	41.8	27.4	36.7	10.5	21.5	7.92*
7. I learn more about myself in the group	31.6	17.5	30.5	27.5	37.9	55.0	6.34*
8. I learn how to improve my relationship with others through the group experience	48.9	33.8	35.1	19.5	16.0	46.8	19.45**
9. The group experience helps me to understand other people better	61.1	39.0	26.3	28.6	12.6	32.5	11.91**

Table 3 (continued)

Statement	Response Category						Chi Square
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		
	S	L	S	L	S	L	
10. The group experience helps me to develop more confidence in myself	36.8	25.0	40.0	28.8	23.2	46.3	10.38**
11. I find it easy to talk with the group leaders	70.5	62.5	24.2	26.3	5.3	11.3	2.44
12. I would recommend this type of group experience to a friend	52.1	25.6	27.7	21.8	20.2	52.6	20.83**
13. The group experience has helped me to feel better about myself	27.2	22.8	50.0	31.6	22.8	45.6	10.37**

Note Chi Squares based on raw scores

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 4

Response Distribution on the Group Counseling Evaluation Instrument by Sex; Male (M) vs Female (F)

Statement	Response Category						Chi Square
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1. Ideas can be freely expressed in the group	67.2	64.8	25.0	19.4	7.8	15.7	2.59
2. Feelings are mutually shared by group members	51.6	45.9	28.1	24.8	20.3	29.4	1.71
3. The group atmosphere is relaxing	60.9	40.4	21.9	37.6	17.2	22.0	7.16*
4. I feel that I can trust other group members	53.1	34.5	34.4	50.0	12.5	15.5	5.85
5. The group discussions are meaningful to me	43.8	34.9	40.6	35.8	15.6	29.4	4.22
6. I find the group leaders to be helpful	65.6	45.5	25.0	35.5	9.4	19.1	6.97*
7. I learn more about myself in the group	28.1	23.4	31.3	27.9	40.6	48.6	1.08
8. I learn how to improve my relationship with others through the group experience	50.0	37.6	24.2	30.3	25.8	32.1	2.49

Table 4 (continued)

Statement	Response Category						Chi Square
	Positive		Neutral		Negative		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
9. The group experience helps me to understand other people better	58.7	46.8	30.2	25.7	11.1	27.5	6.40*
10. The group experience helps me to develop more confidence in myself	35.9	28.8	35.9	34.2	28.1	36.9	1.62
11. I find it easy to talk with the group leaders	79.7	59.5	18.8	28.8	1.6	11.7	9.35**
12. I would recommend this type of group experience to a friend	46.9	36.1	25.0	25.0	28.1	38.9	2.50
13. The group experience has helped me to feel better about myself	35.5	19.3	37.1	44.0	27.4	36.7	5.61

Note

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$